

Proper Handwashing Reduces Flu Spread

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Influenza, also known as the flu, is a viral infection that affects the respiratory tract. Flu symptoms can include a high fever, headaches, sore throat, dry cough, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches. The most common way the virus is transmitted is through the air if someone that is infected coughs or sneezes.

The virus can then enter the nose or mouth of the healthy person causing that person to become infected. It can also be spread from hand to mouth when a healthy person fails to wash their hands after touching a surface or an object that has been contaminated by an infected person.



Besides vaccination, handwashing is the easiest way to prevent transmission of the disease. Handwashing is most effective when it is done frequently and effectively. The recommended procedure for proper handwashing is to wash hands vigorously for 20 seconds using warm water and adequate soap. Be sure to concentrate on the wrists, backs of hands, between the fingers, and around the fingernails. Rinse hands well with warm water. Then dry your hands with a disposable paper towel. Last, use the paper towel to turn the water off at the faucet, and to open the door when exiting.

Hands should be washed frequently throughout the day. Some important times to wash hands would be: after using the restroom; after coughing, sneezing or using a tissue; before and after eating; after touching cuts, burns or infected areas on the skin; after shaking hands or handling money; and after playing with animals. Keep in mind the best time to wash your hands is whenever they become contaminated.

Adequate handwashing is one of the most effective measures in preventing the spread of the flu virus. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention also recommends these tips for flu prevention: Avoid close contact with ill people. Stay home if you are ill. Cover your sneezes and coughs. Refrain from touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

Vaccination remains the recommended way to prevent the flu. With vaccinations in short supply this year, people are looking for other measures to help prevent the spread of this disease. It is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that people in high-risk groups receive

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vaccination. These groups include: children age 6-23 months; adults age 65 years and older; residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities; women who will be pregnant during flu season; persons age 2-64 with chronic medical conditions; health care workers involved in direct patient care; children age 6 months to 18 years who take aspirin daily; and out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children under 6 months old.

For more information on handwashing and influenza visit these KDHE Web sites: ['Did You Wash 'Em?'](#) and [Influenza](#) page.